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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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POW/MIA Consultations Conclude in Laos

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the four nations involved in accounting for Americans missing from the Vietnam War agreed to work together over the next year to craft an action plan for future POW/MIA activities in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. They also pledged to continue the increased cooperation that resulted from the 2004 Consultations in searching for losses in border areas.

Chief of Staff of the DPMO Mel Richmond, hosted the 2005 Consultations, held in Luang Prabang, Laos. Senior leaders from the United States, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam gathered to explore a common vision, to share experiences and to set a course for future work in recovering the remains of missing Americans.

Laos' Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Phongsavath Boupha opened the meeting noting the strong cooperation in the search for Americans by the people of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The successes in accounting for the Americans, he noted, are due to the support of local authorities for the more than 20 years that U.S. teams have operated jointly in Laos.

He pledged his nation's continued cooperation in this humanitarian mission of achieving the fullest possible accounting of the missing.

Richmond stated that while the four nations had achieved successes in accounting for missing Americans, "there is much left to do." He added that, "it is our task to shape that work so we can most effectively achieve our goal of the fullest possible accounting for all who are still missing."

The U.S. Ambassador to Laos, Patricia M. Haslach, noted that time and fading memories were not on the side of this effort. She spoke of the cooperation from the Lao people, and relayed the thanks from American families with whom she had met. The cooperation from Laos, she said, has been the lynchpin of the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

During this, the third annual multinational POW/MIA Consultation, technical experts briefed on ways to improve procedures in tri-border investigations, and methods in which witnesses to crash sites might better be identified. The delegates agreed that the highest priority must be focused on those cases involving servicemen last known to be alive (LKA) at the time of their incident of loss.

Resolving the LKA cases and improving trilateral investigations in the border regions are areas President Bush has identified as key to success in accounting for missing Americans.

Since the end of the war, and with the cooperation of the three Southeast Asian nations, the United States has accounted for 768 Americans, with 1,815 still unaccounted for. More than 88,000 are still missing from all conflicts.

Additional information on POW/MIA accounting may be found on the DPMO Web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or by calling (703) 699-1169 .